

Testimony of Myron Armijo
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American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearings
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
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Introduction. Thank you, Chairperson Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Subcommittee Members for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for the FY 2026 federal budget. My name is Myron Armijo and I am the Governor of the Santa Ana Pueblo in New Mexico. As discussed further below, my testimony covers various critical programs and functions within the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service.

Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility. Before discussing individual program funding, it is important to highlight that recent federal actions have great potential to cause long-lasting harm across Indian Country. The United States fulfills its trust and treaty obligations through both the direct delivery of Tribal programs and services and provision of federal funding to Tribal Nations and Tribal organizations serving Tribal Nations. Over time, the United States has created a web of different mechanisms it uses to deploy federal funding to serve Tribal Nations and Tribal communities. Essential services provided by Federal employees include healthcare services through the Indian Health Service, law enforcement and public safety through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and educational services through the Bureau of Indian Education—not to mention countless other essential and legally mandated services provided by employees serving in Tribal offices and throughout the federal government. Any Tribal program or funding delivered to Tribal Nations is provided in furtherance of the United States’ trust and treaty obligations. The federal employees necessary for the functioning of those Tribal programs and the disbursement of those Tribal funds are also part of the trust and treaty obligations. These agencies have not been fully staffed in recent memory, and terminating staff now will devastate the delivery of vital services to Indian country.

We urge this Committee to defend Indian program funding, and to block reductions in staff of the BIA and BIE, in fulfillment of the trust responsibility of the United States and for the well-being of Native peoples.

Indian Health Service. It was very concerning that the termination of nearly 1,000 employees of the Indian Health Service was under consideration, but also hopeful that the voice of Indian Country was heard, and the planned termination was rescinded. Rather than cutting the Indian Health Service, which is woefully underfunded, it should be allocated additional resources.

Santa Ana has been in advanced negotiations with the Indian Health Service about the construction of a new hospital facility on our reservation lands. Not only are new facilities desperately needed, but the facilities themselves are powerful engines of economic activity and employment. It would be tragic if after all this work this project would be upended.

Provide Full and Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service. The Indian Health Service faces annually compounding challenges related to supplies, staffing levels, infrastructure and facilities, and high rates of negative health outcomes among AI/ANs as a result of the

chronic failure to fully fund trust and treaty obligations in Indian health. *Santa Ana urges the Committee to support making advance appropriations permanent, expanding advance appropriations for the entirety of the four main appropriations accounts: services, facilities, contract support costs, and payments for Tribal leases, and to support a multi-billion dollar increase to achieve full funding in FY 2026.*

\$250 Million with a Self-Governance Funding Mechanism Option for the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). *For program stability and expansion, we advocate for an increase in mandatory funding to \$250 million with automatic annual adjustments for medical inflation. We also ask that Congress authorize the use of either a grant (as currently used) or Public Law 93-638 funding mechanisms for SDPI participants consistent with Tribal sovereignty.*

Funding Implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. The STOP Act and its regulations will assure the protection of many sensitive tribal items from illegal export. It is important to put in place the necessary resources in the federal government to enable this law to be implemented. *We request that at least \$1 million be allocated for FY 2026 and beyond for the purposes of implementation and enforcement of this law.*

Conclusion. We understand that the current administration wants to reduce waste and misuse of federal funds, and to reduce what some consider a bloated federal bureaucracy. But the agencies that serve Indian nations have never been “bloated;” indeed, they have rarely been fully enough staffed to render effective services to their Indian wards. And funding for Indian programs, as vitally important as it is to the Indian tribes and nations throughout the country, makes up a tiny fraction of the federal budget, and we have never been aware of any waste or misuse of those funds. Rather, the funding that Congress has provided has rarely been sufficient to fulfill the government’s trust responsibilities. I can only reiterate, with as much emphasis as I can muster, that the funding and services that the United States provides to the Indian tribes and people are provided pursuant to a unique responsibility that the government has towards the original inhabitants of this land, unlike any other function served by the government. We urge that the fulfillment of this solemn responsibility not be defeated by a blind push to downsize government generally. Thank you for your attention.